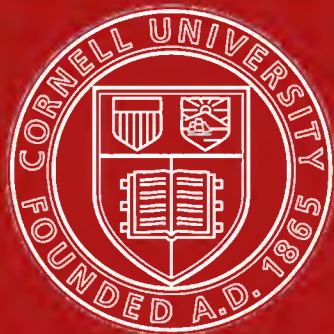


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Biographical sketch of the Honorable Sil



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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH
OF THE
HONORABLE SILAS WOOD.

IF HISTORY has one duty superior to another, it is that of rescuing from oblivion, and preserving for posterity, the pattern and example of those men who, without selfishness or ambition, have devoted themselves to gathering the memorials and remnants of the past, for the benefit of later generations. In this class was peculiarly to be named the HON. SILAS WOOD, whose name and fame Long-Island will not willingly "let die," although he has himself done his utmost to escape personal notice and commendation.

Silas Wood, author of the Sketch, &c., was born at West Hills, in the town of Huntington, Suffolk Co., L. I., September 14, 1769.

Jonas Wood, the ancestor of the family in this country, came from Halifax, in England, between 1630 and 1640. He was among the first settlers of Hempstead, and is named in the patent of that town in 1644.

He removed to Southampton, Suffolk Co., L. I., about 1649, and from thence to the town of Huntington, about 1655, at a place called West Hills, near the borders of Queens, about five miles south of the present village of Huntington. He purchased the eastern half of Copiague, and the Five Necks east of it, in 1657.

He was one of the deputies appointed to go to New-Haven, to solicit a union with that Colony, in 1658, and is mentioned in the town records the 20th April, 1660. An act of Joanna, his widow and administratrix, is mentioned the 18th of May following, from which it appears that he died between the 20th April and the 18th May, 1660. A family tradition informs us that he was drowned in attempting to ford the Peconic River at or near Riverhead.

The materials are too scanty to enable us to pursue his genealogy with accuracy in this sketch.

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A lineal descendant of Jonas, was Joshua Wood, of Huntington, born October 12, 1716, who died September 6, 1779, aged 63. He was married to Ruth Wood, born May 26, 1724, who died August 29, 1807, aged 84.

These two last named were the father and mother of Samuel, Selah, and Silas Wood, the two first being respectable farmers, the last and youngest being destined to pursue the associated career of lawyer, statesman, and historian, which, with no other ambition on his part than for usefulness, will long hold him in the public memory.

His years, to thirteen, were spent in Huntington, when he was sent for tuition to the Rev. Mr. Talmage, of Brookhaven, with whom he continued two years. At fifteen, he went to Fairfield, Conn., where he continued one year, and at sixteen entered Princeton College, N. J., then under the Presidency of the learned Dr. Witherspoon. Here he continued four years, and pursued a full course of classical studies. He is said, though so young, to have taken the first position in his class, and to have graduated with the highest honors. He was then chosen a tutor in the college, and continued such for five years, severely impairing his health by his duties and his devotion to general literature. In 1795, when twenty-six years old, and two years after he had left Princeton, he was elected to the Assembly of this State, from Suffolk County. He continued to serve for four years, taking an active and originative part in the business of the house. He introduced the bills for the formation of social libraries, relative to the Treasurer's office, when the office of Comptroller was first established, and a new organization of the Treasury Department was made. As chairman of a joint committee, he introduced the first general Highway Act, which has since prevailed in the State, with some amendments, and the exemption of a few counties which have secured special acts.

After leaving the Assembly, he spent a few years in forming a settlement on some lands which he owned in the northern part of Johnstown. While here, in 1802, at thirty-two years of age, he married Catharine Huyck, whose parents were from Kinderhook. This young lady was born November 18, 1785, and died July 18, 1803, the year after her marriage, at the early age of eighteen, leaving an infant son who survived her but three days.

A friend writes: "I am not positive that this lady died *in* Johns-

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town. Her death was very sudden, while they were on a journey through some wilderness in Montgomery County. He had to bury her without any *civilized* assistance. This incident had the effect to partly unhinge his mind; some supposed it produced occasional insanity, but I doubt whether the affection went to that extent."

This sudden affliction, after a union founded upon the warmest sentiments of love and admiration, is known to have made a profound impression upon the deeply impressible and affectionate nature of Mr. Wood, to have solemnized him to a stronger sense of duty in this life, and elevated his thoughts of the future.

In 1804, he was offered the place of Principal in the Academy at Esopus, at a salary of \$500, and in 1805, he was chosen a Professor in Union College, Schenectady, at \$800. Each of these positions he declined. Determining to pursue the law as a profession, he entered the office of Daniel Cady, Esq., of Johnstown. He was admitted to the Supreme Court on the 15th February, 1810, his license being dated on that day, and signed by the Hon. James Kent, then Chief Justice of that Court.

He was made a Master in Chancery March 2d, 1810, Daniel D. Tompkins being Governor; a solicitor in Chancery May 25, 1813, Hon. John Lansing then being Chancellor.

Immediately after his admission, a partnership was proposed to him by his legal instructor, Daniel Cady, which he accepted. It continued till the spring of 1813. Besides attending to the business of the office, he found time to take part in public affairs, and contributed largely to the columns of the *Montgomery Republican*, then a very influential journal. In the spring of 1813, he returned to Huntington, and there practised his profession. In November, 1817, he was elected by the people of his district (the First Congressional District) as their Representative in the XVIth Congress, and took his seat March 4, 1819. Here he was continued for five successive terms—the XVIth, XVIIth, XVIIIth, XIXth, and XXth Congresses—a period of ten years, which includes the latter half of Mr. Monroe's first term, the whole of his second, and the whole of the term of John Quincy Adams. In 1828, after declining a re-nomination, he was persuaded to stand, by the strongly expressed desires of his constituents. In this election he was defeated by Hon. James Lent, by 3105 votes against 2831, and served his last term in 1829.

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During the most of his time in Congress, he was on the Library Committee, which, though an unpretentious committee, attracting little public notice, was well suited to his tastes, and upon which his knowledge of books and literature enabled him to be extremely useful. His strict views of duty did not allow him to neglect any of the public business while he was there.

His principal speeches while in the House were :

On the question of admitting Missouri into the Union, delivered February 14, 1820. He spoke upon the amendments involving the exclusion of slavery. This amendment he sustained in a learned, earnest, and thorough argument, in the course of which his convictions against slavery as a moral and political element, were decisively expressed.

January 21, 1824 : He spoke against the resolution that Congress ought to provide by law for defraying the expenses incident to the appointment of an Agent or Commissioner to Greece, whenever the President should deem it expedient to make such appointment. He opposed this resolution in a speech which is perhaps the most brilliant of his Congressional performances. In this he shows with great foresight and power of reasoning, the dangers of speedy dissolution, if the United States should intervene as the arbiter and champion of Liberty all over the world, instead of keeping at home and promoting it by just principles and moral example. A learned gentleman, elsewhere alluded to, who represented the same district in Congress with distinction, says, " His speech on the subject of sending aid to the Greeks, was a very able one, and excited very general applause. I heard it greatly applauded in Washington many years after it had been delivered in Congress."

April 2, 1824, his speech on the Tariff. In this, he argues with great force and clearness the desirableness of protection to American manufactures, and particularly the policy of being independent of other nations in regard to articles of which we might be deprived in case of war. Upon this point, the following sentence is an axiom which recent events have made peculiarly worthy of attention :

" The establishments necessary for the fabrication of clothing and arms, should be introduced at any sacrifice. No imaginary advantage to be derived from cheaper productions, would compensate for the mischiefs that would result from the want of the means of self-subsistence and self-defence in time of war."

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May 14, 1826. On the resolutions of Mr. McDuffie, that the Constitution ought to be amended so as to prevent the election of President and Vice-President from devolving on Congress; and that a uniform system of voting by Districts ought to be established in all the States, the number of Districts in each State to equal the number of Senators and Representatives to which such State may be entitled in Congress, and each District having one vote.

These resolutions Mr. Wood opposed, as having a tendency to deprive the States of power, and augment the power and influence of the General Government. His analysis of the Constitution, and discrimination of the differing powers of the National and State Governments, are masterly.

April 5, 1826. On the resolution that it was expedient to appropriate the funds necessary to enable the President of the United States to send Ministers to the Congress of Panama, and the amendment of Mr. Mc Lane, of Delaware, that the Ministers who might be sent should attend in a diplomatic character merely, and not be authorized to discuss any proposition of alliance between this country and the Spanish American Government, Mr. Wood sustained the Resolution, and opposed the Amendment. He held that it was sound policy to cultivate the best relations of friendship and commerce with the Spanish American nations; and that the President and the Senate having agreed to send Ministers, the House had no right to interfere with the treaty-making power in the manner proposed by the Amendment. Incidentally, he discusses the whole question with the broadest comprehension of all its relations.

Each of his speeches is a series of distinct propositions, thoroughly fortified by ancient and modern precedents and examples. There are in them no appeals to passion or prejudice, nor the most distant allusion to any constituency less broad than the Union. They are succinct and pointed, evincing most diligent and careful preparation, and read like treatises or essays.

There are no speeches of the time more valuable for a full, clear, and fair exposition of the phase of the subject he intends to discuss.

It is difficult to say when he first began to gather materials for his "Sketch." It is probable that he was engaged in this work some eight or ten years before he considered it completed. Very few, not accustomed to historical explorations, can comprehend the time and labor required to ascertain facts, to weigh properly their

importance, and give them their true place in the narrative. The mind of Silas Wood was too faithful to stop short of the fullest endeavor. It was industrious, comprehensive, patient, eager, and analytical. He was constant in the pursuit of any information he required, and when it was obtained, it was subjected to the most thorough sifting, none but the vital parts being retained. Whatever other histories of the Island have been or may be, this Sketch has not been and will not be exceeded as a work of thorough labor, faithful discrimination, and honest judgment.

I add here a letter to his brother historian, Benjamin F. Thompson, Esq., alluding to the sources of authority consulted by him :

HUNTINGTON, August 6, 1841.

"DEAR SIR:—It may be of some benefit for you to know the sources from which I derived the facts in my Sketch of the First Settlement of Long-Island.

"1. I in person examined the Clerks' Offices of every town on the Island, a number of them twice, and one or more of them three times.

"2. The offices of the various counties three times.

"3. The office of the Secretary of State twice, particularly in relation to the early Dutch Records translated by Vanderkemp; the Journals of the Provincial Congress; the Records of the Governor and Council, under the Colony, and the Records of the first Assemblies.

"4. The Records of the Dutch Church in New-York, and, directly or indirectly, of other churches; also the early records of the different Courts.

"5. The N. Y. City Library, the Library of the Historical Society, New-York, and the Congressional Library, Washington; Howard's Collection of the Records of the New-England Colonies; the Collection of the Historical Society of Massachusetts; Cotton Mather's *Magnalia*; Trumbull's *History of Connecticut*, and all, or almost all the histories which have been written in New-England relative to the early settlement of those States, with the biographical sketches of the first settlers, the most of which I found in the library of Congress.

"I obtained considerable information relative to our first ancestors, from Winthrop's *Journal*, Mather's *Magnalia*, Hubbard's *His-*

tory of New-England, Trumbull's History of Connecticut, and the catalogues of the early colleges.

"6. I also got friends and correspondents to examine the records of the Colony of Connecticut, of the Colony of Rhode Island, of the General Court of Massachusetts, of the towns of Concord, Fairfield, and Newark.

"7. I also had recourse to family records, old wills and deeds, to the inscriptions on tombstones in the old burial grounds, and in a few, but very few instances, to family traditions. I admitted no fact not supported by some one or other of these authorities, although it may be that in a few instances, as in that of Mr. Denton, I may have been misled by them.

" Respectfully Yours,
" SILAS WOOD."

B. F. THOMPSON, Esq.

When the distant points are considered at which these authorities had to be reached, it must be for those who have performed similar labors, to appreciate the devotion of the author, and the sacrifices made by him to confer this gift upon the people of his native Island.

Mr. Thompson, whose History is very valuable for its details, and accumulates a large body of minute modern information, with much of personal memoir and anecdote, gratified his own feelings and sense of justice, by dedicating his first edition to Silas Wood, whose work, more closely limited to the early settlements, may be said to be dissolved and absorbed in the two respectable volumes of Mr. Thompson, with but slight modifications. Mr. Wood, while aiding Mr. Thompson by every means in his power, requested that the dedicatory compliment should be omitted from the second edition. It was from no disrespect to Mr. Thompson, but the result of modesty and self-abnegation. Mr. Wood was always characterised by modesty, simplicity, and plainness. When Mr. Thompson's books were published, he was endeavoring more than ever to strip from himself every "robe of pride," and to "clothe himself with humility."

From June 12, 1818, until some time in 1821, he was District Attorney of Suffolk County, by appointment of De Witt Clinton, Governor.

In December, 1829, he took for his second wife Elizabeth, daugh-

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ter of Josiah Smith, of Long Swamp. By a mysterious Providence, he had by this, as by his former marriage, but one child, who died also in early infancy. He was thus left with no descendants to inherit his lands, or to enjoy that better patrimony of the public respect for his character and labors.

His "Sketch" was promulgated in three editions, all of which were printed and published in Brooklyn, by Col. Alden Spooner; the first in 1824, in 66 pages, octavo; the second in 1826, in 112 pages; the third in 1828, in 183 pages. The first edition was of 250 copies; the second and third of but 100 copies, each—which last were ordered by its conscientious writer, in order to do fuller justice to the memory of General Woodhull, by the ampler memoir in the Appendix.

This book, now so rare, and commanding so high a price, was of very slow sale. The sheets of several copies remained unclaimed in the hands of the binder, until a year or two ago, when they were discovered by a mousing owl of the L. I. Historical Society, and "snapped up." The views of the author—who himself paid the principal expenses of the printing—were amply satisfied in sending his copies, to an appreciative few on the Island and elsewhere, knowing that in good time the tree he had so carefully planted and pruned, would produce fruit which the coming generations would enjoy.

In the Spring of 1830, Silas Wood formally relinquished his professional pursuits and public life, and determined to devote himself to meditations which had long pressed themselves upon his mind as of higher import than earthly ambitions. One inducement to withdraw from the toils of his profession might have been the fundamental change which took place in the law system of the State, by substituting the partial Codification, termed the Revised Statutes, for the great body of the Common Law, to which the older practitioners had grown accustomed. Certain it is, that this great reform affected Silas Wood disagreeably. He was too old to adapt himself to the changes. The writer, then a student, recollects his observations on the subject. He remembers very well the pleasant and jocular tone in which he said, "it may do very well for you young folks, but as for us old fellows, we might as well give up!" He did give up, sold his library, and was no longer seen in the courts.

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Again, there were some things in the fashions of politics which as little suited him. A sect of politicians was desirous of his leadership. These would not nominate without certain pledges. To a man of the crystalline honor and purity of Silas Wood, the whole system of pledges was disgusting and revolting. He refused to answer a schedule of questions submitted to him, saying that he was no seeker of office, and if his public character was not the assurance and guarantee needed, he did not need the party who sought him. He was an old-fashioned actor, whose pure style was no longer in vogue, and who was at least free from the common error of loitering too late upon the public stage.

These, with other recollections more grateful, linger in the mind of the writer, whose acquaintance with Silas Wood began in 1824, when the writer was about fourteen years old, and Mr. Wood was in Brooklyn, superintending the publication of his first edition. Can the writer ever forget the quiet cordiality and simplicity with which, from the moment of meeting, he put himself entirely upon easy terms with a boy who beheld him for the first time, and held this boy enchanted with pleasant stories, and simple problems in science, intended to entertain the mind, and to call into exercise its practical qualities? I perfectly recollect, among other things, a sort of West Point disquisition, in which he demonstrated to me, with pencil upon paper, the force of certain projectiles, and described the "parabolic curves" they would make in passing through the air, till they descended upon their destined object. If the writer could have imagined what he has since witnessed, he would have taken these lessons more to heart. He must have been an admirable teacher.

The writer never could lose the feeling of right to his fellowship. A little while after his announced retirement into absolute seclusion, his stoppage of his newspapers, and sale of his library, the writer, while on a business errand to Huntington, ventured to break in upon his old friend. Did he not find him changed? Not a whit! Yes, a little, and that was as to his exterior garb. Plain as he always was, his attire was now the perfection of disregard of dress—the very costume of one who had ceased to care for the exterior things of life and men. But he doffed his slouched hat impulsively—dragged his visitor into his antique, unpainted, low-roofed, shingled house, and commenced to talk by the hour. All

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his familiar friends agree that there were few better talkers than Silas Wood. There have been some, like Coleridge, who were more bold, imaginative, and sparkling, but few were so clear, affectionate, and persuasive. Some contemporaries of Silas Wood yet live, who will agree with me that few men of his time could so enchain a friend by the dexterity and charm of his conversation. Conversation with him was not monologue. It was a justly harmonized dialogue. It was sympathetic, delicate, reciprocal, inquisitive, suggestive. He drew his colloquist out in the best way—giving him every motive and opportunity for the fullest expression.

But there must have been more than the changes in law and politics, to induce the retirement into seclusion of such a man as Silas Wood. His mind always clear as to the Divine source of Light and Consolation, undoubtedly turned implicitly in that direction from poignant afflictions and disappointments of the tenderest character. Besides, at sixty years old, it was time to part with earthly ambitions. It would not have been unlike his chastened tastes and sentiments, if he had early made it a part of his plan of life to retire at sixty, and by confining himself to books of religion and moral science, and to his farm,

"To husband out life's taper to the close,
And keep the flame from wasting by repose."

Certain it is that he did close up, as far as was easily practicable, without assuming the character of a hermit, every avenue of the external world, particularly that wide avenue of the newspaper, and exchanged his law books for an excellent and profound selection of works on theology. To the Holy Scriptures and these works, he gave all his leisure time for reading.

I have his catalogue before me. It comprises one hundred and eighty-two works, admirably well selected. It is headed: "Religious books belonging to the Library of Silas Wood," and classified:

"The Holy Bible, Commentaries on it, and works in vindication of the truth, inspiration, and doctrines of it."

"Books connected with the Bible, and illustrating the History of the Bible and of the Church."

"Sermons and Treatises."

"Practical Works."

"Biography."

Among these books are four editions of the Bible, Patrick and

Louth's "Commentaries," "Henry on the whole Bible," Scott, Newton "on the Prophecies," Shuckford's "Connection of Sacred and Profane History," Prideaux's "Connection of the Old and New Testament," Witherspoon's, Edwards's, Bellamy's, Dwight's, Davis's, Walker's Works, &c., &c. The value attached to these, at a low cost, is \$317 75.

The most of these books he bequeathed to the Presbyterian Church and congregation of Sweet Hollow, near Huntington. This was an old congregation, but organized under the General Church Act, on the 24th of June, 1843.

Silas Wood was, in appearance, a little above the average height, say five feet ten inches high, of a brownish complexion, weighing 160 or 170 pounds. He was erect in carriage, with broad shoulders and fine forehead. The expression of his countenance was amiable, but indicative of great firmness and decision. In conversation, he was more animated than in public speaking. His features then sparkled with the various and unreserved play of his mind, not restrained by any weight of public responsibility. In his younger days, and during his political career, he was neat and plain in his attire, but in his latter years quite negligent in this respect. A leading lawyer in Suffolk says, "he came to my wedding (in his later years) in a handsome suit of black broadcloth, but his shirt-bosom and cravat were much worn and frayed out." The same gentleman also writes: "In taste he was a great admirer of female beauty, and frequently entertained my sisters with minute descriptions of the belles of Washington. He was exceedingly fluent in conversation, always entertaining, and generally instructive."

"When I commenced the practice of my profession, Mr. Wood was the conceded head of the Suffolk County Bar. He was very potential both with the Court and Juries, not so much on account of any extensive knowledge of the principles of law, or readiness in their application, as by reason of his deservedly high general character, and his plausible address.

"Mr. Wood was firm in his political sentiments, but by no means a warm partizan. He could discern the errors in his own party as well as those of his political opponents. His habit of voting for what he approved, without reference to party, induced De Witt Clinton to compare him to the pendulum of a clock—first on one side and then on the other."

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The same gentleman sends an encomium on his Greek speech, (which we have quoted in another place), and apropos of this speech, which was widely approved, tells the following anecdote, which affords a hint to ladies who would pay a literary compliment: "On an occasion when Mr. Wood was to pass the night at his house, the ladies procured a copy of this speech, and took care to place it so that it would be certain to salute his eye with the look of an intimate friend of the household. If the learned and agreeable guest, who had disciplined his mind against most forms of flattery, had nevertheless been susceptible to so delicate a compliment, it would have lost something of its flavor by his discovery, that *the leaves were uncut*."

Another intimate friend, and for some time a cotemporary at the bar, gives the following hints:—

"The life of Silas Wood was of such an even tenor, while residing in this County, that I think it will be difficult to find any very prominent incidents—any strongly illustrative of character. Whoever sketches his life will, I think, be confined to a delineation of character. I cannot attempt this—it would be quite out of my vocation.

"Any person, on a slight acquaintance, would have noticed his naturalness and simplicity, almost childlike; in this respect to be compared, I suppose, with the late Chancellor Kent.

"His pure unselfishness, and untiring industry in meeting any claim for information or assistance, whether professional or otherwise, were remarkable. His aim seemed to be to oblige, and to do good, with little regard to personal sacrifice.

"To collect facts with relation to the early condition of estates—the pedigree of families—as well as the early history of the country, was with him a passion. In search of these he would travel from one end of the county to the other, in his plain box-wagon, and as plain in his personal appearance.

"A relation of his, a counsellor-at-law, with his wife (a daughter of old Gov. Ellsworth, of Connecticut), when on the Island, called upon him at his residence in West Hills—a very ancient structure. They were surprised at the contrast between his public reputation and his private style of life.

"No person's visits were more welcome than his; they were always too short. His memory was a store-house of facts, on al-

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most every subject, and always at his command ; and there were few social treats so rich, as a call even, from Silas Wood.

"I do not believe that he ever made an effort to procure office for himself. He did not belong to the dominant political party here ; and yet, when subjection to party dictation was regarded as of unquestionable obligation, the people sent him to Congress. It was an impulsive recognition of his personal worth, which, for the time, thrust aside all party calculations.

"I am inclined to believe that he was a lover of order and method in all his business. A neighbor of his once said to me, 'if Silas Wood should see a spear of his grass bent down, he would straighten it up.'

"His perfect integrity was never doubted. He was correct in his moral conduct. He was subject to fits of asthma, during which, for nights in succession, he could not lie down. In a few instances, in such cases, he became overcome with liquor, taken as a stimulant, so as to lose all self-control, and this seemed to be the effect on him of the first excitement. This spot on his disk was transient, and not to be noticed."

A biography would be but a eulogy, if the spots upon character and the frailties of poor human nature were not fairly exhibited. I have taken care, therefore, to put in this sketch all that could be learned of the peculiarities, weaknesses, and inadvertencies of one of the purest of Long-Island men.

Another learned and able lawyer, who has grown old at the Suffolk bar, says of him :

"He was at Riverhead in 1825, when I made my *debut* at the bar. We then became acquainted, and he appeared, afterward, much interested in me as a young lawyer of the county. He was a man of very general knowledge, and I always felt profited in his company. I am sure no lawyer was ever more highly esteemed by the mass of the people, for candor and honesty. His personal popularity in the county was very great."

One, his near neighbor, and who and whose father now deceased, were always intimate friends, sends me more valuable facts than could have been gleaned from any other source.

From this source, I learn that he gave, by will, direction to his executors, to burn all his "writings," which direction was faithfully executed, so far as any of his manuscripts or papers were in their

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possession. A few of these in some way escaped discovery, and were discovered in the researches for this Memoir.

The same friend writes :

“ As to his stature, my recollections are, that he was rather more than medium height, say five feet ten, to six feet, broad shoulders, fine forehead, and when in his prime he must have been a man of fine appearance. I have not language at command to describe the animated expression of his flashing eyes and beaming countenance when he became interested even on ordinary topics. I never heard him at the bar, nor in the National nor State Councils; but it is easy to imagine how he must have warmed up with any great topic which engaged his thoughts and feelings. He spoke rapidly, and his gesticulation was quick and earnest, rather than measured or dignified. I know it was my father's opinion that he stood at the head of the bar of Suffolk.”

Another anecdote is in several points characteristic :—

“ From a high point near the residence of his youth, at West Hills, he had often looked upon the Sound, and the blue line of the main land beyond on the one side, and the broad Atlantic on the other. When he came to hear Hempstead Harbor Hill, (whose recorded elevation is 319 feet above the level of the Sound) claimed as the highest ground on the Island, he felt assured that a point at West Hills was higher. This is a spot denominated “Oakley's High Hill Field,” which afterwards came into the possession of Zebulon Rogers. In October, 1825, he called to his aid an experienced and accurate surveyor, Mr. Abel Ketcham, who took all the elevations from the water level of the Sound, and determined, as Mr. Wood had foreseen, that this point was $354\frac{1}{2}$ feet above such level, and therefore $35\frac{1}{2}$ feet higher than the Harbor Hill. This position of vantage to his native hills was evidently gratifying to Mr. Wood. It touched a feeling of pride and romance in his character. The town records were, in 1832, in the custody of the late Moses Rolph. Mr. Wood in that year, on the 22d September, took the pains to have the field notes of this survey, with a certificate signed with his name, entered on the records of the town, by pasting the same firmly in the book of town minutes.

“ Mr. Wood was always deeply interested in the welfare of young people, and constantly gave them valuable advice. He would adapt his manner and conversation to the companionship and en-

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tainment of children, and was always a welcome guest at every child's home.

"If he had any marked peculiarity, it was his precision. He was in all things a lover of order and regularity, observing punctuality himself, and enforcing it in others.

"After he had made up his mind to join the Presbyterian Church, he was 'all Presbyterian.' Several anecdotes could be told to show his tenacity and strictness in regard even to the forms of the Church, and his strict guardianship against any looseness of practice or latitudinarianism of doctrine. In particular, he was anxious that the councils of the church should be actively maintained. An anecdote to this purport occurs: The Synod of New-York was to hold its annual meeting at Sag Harbor, I think in the year 1843. It was then a long drive from our part of the Island; the cars did not run through, as now, to Greenport, and the journey was to be performed with horses. For this reason, or a better one, the elder appointed by Session could not go. Mr. Wood ascertained there was likely to be no lay representative, and though only a private member of the church, the thought of this possible neglect jarred painfully upon his feelings. He instantly took counsel with the members of the Session, came into my house and read a severe lesson upon the propriety, nay, the necessity, of lay representation, and before four o'clock in the afternoon one of the elders, with carpet-bag packed, was on his way, with the pastor, towards Sag Harbor."

In addition to his Sketch of the Early Settlements on Long Island, Mr. Wood prepared a valuable sketch of the town history of Huntington, entitled "A Geography of the Town of Huntington, with a brief history of its first settlement, and political condition to the end of the Revolution," printed at Washington, in 1824, by Davis & Force, which is in 30 octavo pages. The edition was doubtless very limited, and a part of it was burned in the house of Moses Rolph, his neighbor.

The miniature from which the engraving is made (with which this Sketch is embellished,) is in the first style of art, painted by a master-hand, on ivory, and was probably taken when Mr. Wood was a member of Congress, and forty-five years old or thereabouts. There is a so-called likeness, in profile, among the members of the Legislature in 1798, published in the Documentary History of the State, but his friends fail to trace in it the slightest resemblance.

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A gentleman of New York, formerly from Huntington, says, that when a young man he knew Silas Wood; that while employed as clerk in a store in New York, Mr. Wood called, in his absence, and left a book for him. It was "Locke on the Human Understanding," and was the first book which set him to thinking.

It is supposed that a great portion of his later writings, which were destroyed by his direction, were upon theological topics.

In the year 1832, when he was sixty-three years of age, he made a public profession of religion, and connected himself with the Presbyterian Church in Huntington.

I quote here from the obituary notice, from a friendly and competent hand, (understood to be that of the Rev. Mr. McDougall, his pastor,) in the Long Islander, just after his death, from which I have already largely drawn :

"He was a warm advocate of early religious education, and strongly attached to catechetical instruction. He often adverted with interest to the former days, when parents were in the habit of employing part of every Sabbath day in training their children to this exercise. He was very partial to standard theological works. So familiar was he with the writings of Witherspoon and Edwards, that when unable to read for himself, he could name the page containing the subject which he wished to have read to him.

"But if we judge of his estimation of books from his familiarity with them, we must conclude that the Bible exceeded all others, for with no book was he more familiar. The old pocket Bible, which had been his companion since the days of his boyhood, bearing the date of 1783, exhibits signs not only of age, but of faithful use. He had the New Testament almost by heart, and was able at any time to turn directly to chapter and verse. It was not until late in life that he made a public profession of religion, though he had for a long time before manifested a lively interest in the affairs of the church."

He had been for some time aware of his approaching end, and made the most minute preparations for the comfort of his wife after his departure. As illustrative of this kind trait, as well as of his habits of order, a friend relates that he called to him the man accustomed to cart his wood, and directed him after his decease to bring in the wood at a particular gate, to leave it always in a designated place, to have it cut of convenient size, and to give Mrs. Wood as little trouble as possible.

XXI

His niece says, "he possessed his faculties unimpaired to the last, except that the night before he died he was a little flighty. Just before he died he called the family around him, but did not address them."

A friend says, "I was in to see him the morning before he died. He then appeared to be calm, collected and resigned."

His decease took place March 2d, 1847, in the 78th year of his age. For some years previously he had been dreadfully troubled with the asthma, which often compelled him to sit on his chair all night, and drove him to the use of stimulants as an alleviate. His immediate death was hastened by a severe fall which kept him to his bed for eight months. He is buried in the village of Huntington, in the Old Hill burial ground, which adjoins the Presbyterian parsonage. In this ground, where rest the earliest of the settlers of Huntington, Benjamin Thompson, the Tory General (afterward made Count Rumford by the Duke of Bavaria), encamped his troops during the Revolution, and made sad havoc with the grave stones, many of which were converted into ovens, and subjected to base uses and wanton destruction.

His earlier ancestors are buried on a knoll a few rods north of the old house at West Hills.

As a statesman he was wise and far-sighted, and no man of his time was more free from party bias or prejudice; as a lawyer, highly respectable, though his ability in this department was subordinated to his career as a politician, and his tastes as a scholar and historian. As a historian he was impartial, patient, industrious, and devoted to the truth. No man exceeded him in love for his native Island, and no man could have been more careful to leave a reputation which would honor it.

